

**Public Health Initiative in Nigeria December 29, 2003- January 1, 2004 By LCDR. Nina Mezu Nwaba, Pharm.D.**

On my recent trip to Nigeria in December of 2003, I along with other healthcare professionals conducted a two-day free health fair clinic, in two villages, on two different occasions. Invitations to the health fair were extended in the local churches, as most members of the community were regular attendees. They were given the location and times of the fair and were urged to inform anyone that was not present but interested to also come to the free screenings. It was explained that there will be thorough physical examinations given by qualified and certified United States physicians and among other tests, free screenings for *diabetes*, *hypertension*, *cataract*, *glaucoma* will be held. This was a beginning to the realization of a dream come true for me and the other health care providers. To the patients it was like a gift from God, too good to be true. They were filled with gratitude for the act of kindness they were about to experience.

The first clinic day started in the morning of December 29, 2003 in the village of Ezeogba located in Emekuku, Imo State. As early as 7am patients were already lining up waiting to be seen. We provided tea, chocolate drink and bread for those that needed breakfast while they waited.

Patients were triaged. A comprehensive medical history, and vital signs were taken by one of the physicians while the other two physicians performed complete physical examination and consulted with the patients. They were tested for diabetes, were given free eye exams by licensed optometrist, and were also provided with referrals as needed for follow ups with their regular primary care physicians. The patients were then, referred to the pharmacists, who dispensed medications to them. In addition to addressing the chief complaints and providing medication for their major complaints, all patients were also able to receive vitamins, fever reducing medications, anti-malaria tablets and other necessary prescriptions as appropriate at no cost to them.

We performed the same service at another village on January 1, 2004. Actually, the Chief or head of the village offered and almost insisting that we spend the night even though he knew we had to fly out back to America the next day. Unfortunately, we could not miss our flights, but we did see patients until 10 pm that night before traveling back to our home, which was a 2-hour journey.

The joy and happiness on the faces of the people we examined was worth the long hours. The news of the fair spread quickly and we were on our feet the whole day but every good thing does come to an end, they were very appreciative. Coming out of such a phenomenal feat I can't help but agree with my heart that this public health service was one of the most rewarding experiences any one with a true commitment to the profession can ever dream of.